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ABSTRACT

This policy statement, issued by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in pamphlet form, and approved by the membership, addresses the importance of urban colleges and universities for urban populations, and in particular, for minorities. A first section, on educating urban students, stresses that while seeking academic rigor as a first priority, the urban institution must also seek diversity among its faculty and high levels of access for students. The importance of urban studies including urban life, public administration, social welfare, the arts, city planning, and other related disciplines for the development of public policy is next addressed, followed by a section on school-college collaboration that points out the unique relationship that urban institutions can establish with the public elementary, middle and high schools within their communities. As a consequence, many school-college collaborations can be implemented. Finally, as urban institutions are partners in the economic, cultural and social lives of the cities, the importance of their public-service function is stressed. (JB)

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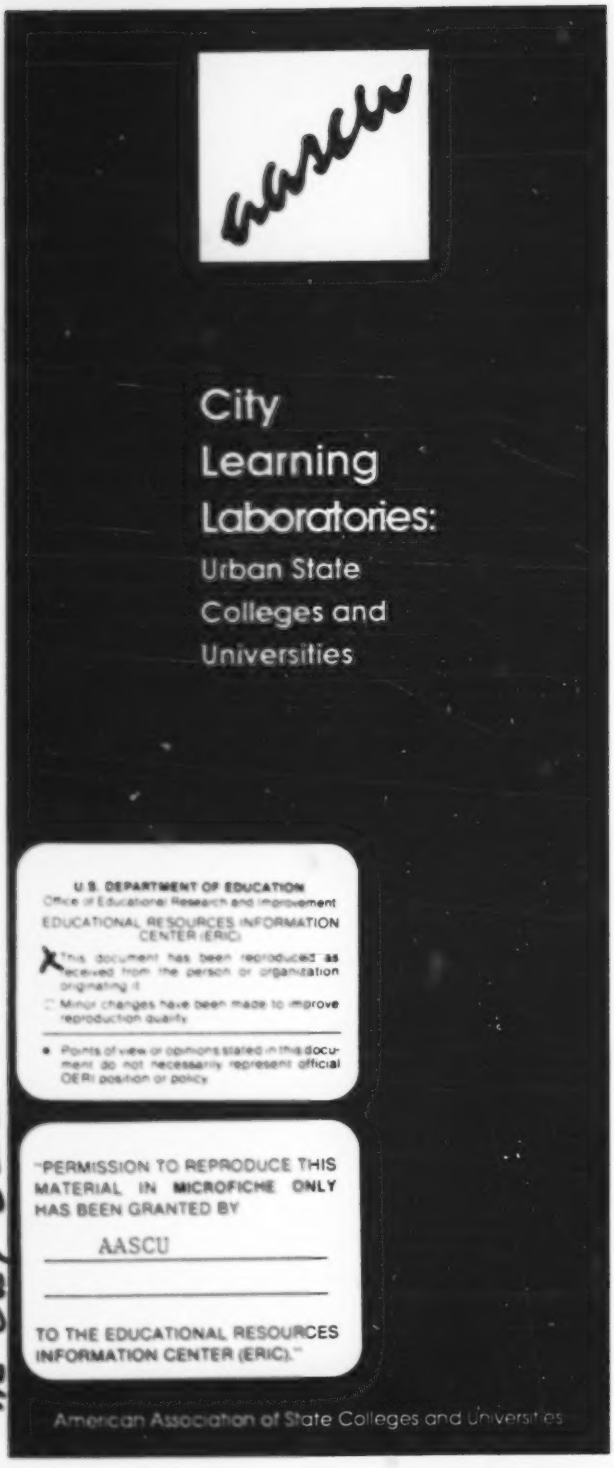
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The following policy statement was developed by the Committee on Urban Affairs of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and approved by the association membership at the 30th annual meeting on November 20, 1990.

The "urban crisis" of past decades has been addressed through refurbishment of our urban cores and center cities, downtown business districts and waterfronts. Gentrification has been urged, to attract middle- and high-income residents to the cities, and to rebuild urban neighborhoods. Some may argue that there is marked, visible evidence of progress in all of our cities, and some may strongly disagree, saying that not nearly enough has been accomplished to claim success.

Despite the progress that has been made, intense human problems remain. Transportation, low-income housing, air and water quality, and a decaying infrastructure continue to affect the quality of urban life. Homelessness has become a highly visible problem in all of our major cities. The drug traffic continues to cause violence and to destroy our youth. Attrition continues at unacceptably high levels in most urban school districts.

The urgency of our urban concerns is heightened by the shifts in the nation's demographics. Early in the next century, one-third of the entrants into the work force will be Asian, Hispanic, or African American, and these young people are already entering our schools in larger numbers. The participation rate for African American and Hispanic males in higher education has dropped precipitously over the last decade. This problem must be addressed if the nation is to have the numbers and skills needed for a competitive work force in the next century.

In this context, the importance of public higher education in urban life is evident. State-supported colleges and universities are the prime vehicles through which citizens can make fundamental, positive changes in their lives. Access to high-quality programs in higher education is vital if the nation's minority and immigrant populations are to be assets in the effort to keep the nation economically competitive.

The nation's urban colleges and universities must succeed if a new generation of teachers and university faculty is to be available when needed. Furthermore, these institutions must remain in the forefront if the nation is to cope effectively with increasing cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. An urban university will seek to articulate its programs with the current needs of urban populations and the future needs of the nation's economy. To achieve this goal, urban universities must focus their academic and public-service resources on problems and conditions that threaten the future productivity of urban populations.

Educating Urban Students

All higher education institutions must seek academic rigor as a first priority. However, urban public colleges and universities must seek this rigor while simultaneously seeking diversity among its faculty, and high levels of access for students.

The students served by urban colleges provide both the greatest challenges and opportunities in higher education. In these institutions, the non-traditional student is the norm. Upwardly mobile young professionals, the underemployed, recent high school graduates, recent immigrants, returning women, and significant numbers of Asian, Hispanic, and African Americans are all generally attracted to urban, state-supported higher education institutions. For this "new majority," our urban institutions are colleges of first resort. For motivated but skills-deficient, recent high school graduates, or dropouts, they might also be colleges of "last resort," because access might not be provided elsewhere. Urban institutions generally offer broad programs that might include developmental studies, English-as-a-second-language and two-year technical programs, as well as stable baccalaureate and graduate degree programs. The wide range of students served has broadened the range of academic offerings at responsive urban colleges and universities. This has challenged the faculty, who have learned to accommodate a new diversity unparalleled in the history of American higher education.

The fact that public urban colleges have done this while containing both expenditures and tuition is an unheralded and remarkable achievement.

The Importance of Urban Studies

The advancement of knowledge about the aspects of urban life, public administration, social welfare, the arts, city planning, and other related disciplines is an important component of a public urban university or college curriculum. Urban universities can share this commitment, by linking their courses, applied research and special programs with urban needs. This enhances the value of the urban university to its community, and ensures another level of linkage to the community served. Applied research within the urban university setting can also be valuable.

Urban colleges and universities serve as repositories for studies and data on urban life and also generate new research. Thus, an urban university can serve as a catalyst for the development and evaluation of public policy. While avoiding excessive politicization, a university can be a vital asset for enlightened urban industry chief executives, city administrators and legislators.

School-College Collaboration

A distinct feature of urban public colleges and universities is the unique relationship they individually establish with the public elementary, middle and high schools within their communities. The urban campus serves as a necessary "learning laboratory" for many of our cities' young people. This is made possible through an array of practical, innovative programs designed to enhance educational opportunities for school students who may be gifted and talented, "at-risk," or have special needs.

These cooperative efforts, known as "school-college/university collaborations," are implemented by a network of university and college administrators, faculty, school representatives, teachers, parents, business leaders, community groups, and students who share a genuine commitment to educating, counseling and mentoring

young people in order to motivate them for success. Leaders of urban universities recognize that these kinds of programs are necessary elements for improving the quality of urban education.

Public Service in Urban Areas

The public-service function is particularly important for publicly supported urban colleges and universities. These institutions are partners in the economic, cultural and social lives of the cities. As partners, they contribute in a multitude of ways to urban vitality, educating students in the traditions and values of the liberal arts and sciences and adding significantly to the citizenry's ability to make informed judgments on complex urban issues.

Economically, the urban university collaborates with business, industry, the public sector, and organized labor to achieve several goals. The university seeks to ensure that its programs are relevant to the continuing education needs of the labor force, and provides ways to increase learning opportunities for faculty and staff members, students and workers. And the university fosters a proper balance in its programs between preparation for employment and advancement, and the acquisition of other measurable and immeasurable benefits traditionally associated with a college education. The urban public college or university also plays a crucial role in the dissemination and transfer of technology vital to business and economic development.

Culturally, urban public colleges and universities benefit cities in two important ways. First, they stimulate people to support the development and growth of cultural institutions and activities. Second, urban colleges themselves are centers of cultural activity, hosting artistic performances, providing library services, sponsoring lectures, and discussing urban issues. As our cities become more culturally diverse, the urban college or university can play an important role as a bridge between minority and immigrant groups and the majority population. These activities are important public services rendered by any urban college or university.

Socially, urban institutions bring together the diverse populations in the city, providing them with a common experience and the values of a liberal education and creating opportunities for increased communication and understanding among the diverse sectors of the city's people.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) is a leading higher education association of over 370 public institutions and over 30 state systems across the United States and in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands.

American Association of State
Colleges and Universities
One Dupont Circle/Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036-1192

Allan W. Ostar, President

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